

Definitions of Youth Development (and Related Terms)



This publication is courtesy of
National Youth Development Information Center
www.nydic.org

Publication No. (ADP) 01-8628

Resource Center
State of California
Alcohol and Drug Programs
1700 K Street
First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

(800) 879-2772 (California Only)
(916) 327-3728
FAX: (916) 323-1270
TTY: (916) 445-1942
Internet: <http://www.adp.ca.gov>
E-Mail: ResourceCenter@adp.state.ca.us

Definitions of Youth Development (and Related Terms)

Youth Development *noun*. A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models which focus solely on youth problems. (*Approved by the executives of National Collaboration for Youth Members, March 1998*)

The following is a list of insights into youth development and related terms. The National Youth Development Information Center will seek additional terminology, revising and expanding this list in an effort to find consistencies and to seek a common youth development language.

Youth Development

Youth development (as the resilient child): "The resilient child is one who works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well." (Norman Garmezy, 1974)

Youth development, an asset-building approach, has the following elements:

- Focusing on the positive
- Taking personal responsibility for making a difference
- Proactive
- Mobilizing the public as well as all youth-serving organizations in a community
- Viewing youth as resources
- A vision-building perspective
- Cooperation within the community
- Unleashing the caring potential of all the residents and organizations so that public resources can be focused on areas of greatest needs
- Hope that change is possible

(*Uniting Communities for Youth*, Benson, Search Institute, 1995)

Youth development is age-specific. It assumes that there are certain growth-related tasks that adolescents must complete to develop into mature adults. (*Youth*

Development: On the Path Toward Professionalization, Hahn, Raley; National Assembly, 1999)

Youth development is the process through which adolescents actively seek, and are assisted, to meet their basic needs and build their individual assets or competencies. (*A Matter of Time*, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992)

Youth development is multidimensional, embracing: (1) a process of human growth and development; (2) a philosophical orientation to social development and community; and (3) a programmatic frame work for youth services. (*A Model of Youth Work Orientations*, Edginton & deOlivera, *Humanics*, pp. 3-7, Spring 1995)

Youth development means purposefully seeking to meet youth needs and build youth competencies relevant to enabling them to become successful adults. Rather than seeing young people as problems, this positive development approach views them instead as resources and builds on their strengths and capabilities to develop within their own community. To succeed youth must acquire adequate attitudes, behaviors, and skills. Youth development programs seek to build competencies in the following areas: physical, social, cognitive, vocational, and moral. (*Building Resiliency*, pp. 11-14, National Assembly, 1994; and *Position Statement on Accountability and Evaluation in Youth Development Organizations*, p. 1, National Collaboration for Youth, 1996)

Healthy youth development strives to help young people develop the inner resources and skills they need to cope with pressures that might lead them into unhealthy and antisocial behaviors. It aims to promote and prevent, not to treat or remediate. Prevention of undesirable behaviors is one outcome of healthy youth development, but there are others: the production of self-reliant, self-confident adults who can take their place as responsible members of society. (*A Matter of Time*, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992)

Youth development is defined as the ongoing process in which all young people are engaged and invested. Through youth development, young people attempt to meet their basic personal and social needs and to build competencies necessary for successful adolescent and adult life. It is an approach, framework, a way to think about young people that focuses on their capacities, strengths, and developmental needs and on their weaknesses and problems.

All young people have basic needs that are critical to survival and healthy development. They include a sense of safety and structure; belonging and membership; self-worth and an ability to contribute; independence and control over one's life; closeness and several good relationships; and competency and mastery. At the same time, to succeed as adults, all youth must acquire positive attitudes and appropriate behaviors and skills in five areas: health; personal/social; knowledge, reasoning and creativity; vocation; and citizenship. (*Making the Case: Community Foundations and Youth Development*, Bonnie Politz, Senior Program Officer, Academy for Educational Development, Center for Youth Development & Policy Research, Foundations for Change, 1996, Second Edition)

Youth Development Programs

Youth development programs prepare young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a structured, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them obtain social, emotional, ethical, physical, and cognitive competencies. They address the broader developmental assets all children and youth need (such as caring relationships, safe places and activities, health and mental health, marketable skills, and opportunities for service and civic participation), in contrast to deficit-based approaches which focus solely on youth problems.

Rather than only seeking to stop young people from engaging in risky behaviors, positive youth development, in addition, aims to mobilize communities to create positive goals and outcomes for all youth. It recognizes that being problem-free is not the same as being fully prepared. Effective programs are *youth centered*: staff and activities engage young people's diverse talents, skills, and interest, building on their strengths and involving them in planning and decision-making. They are also *knowledge centered*: building a range of life skills, activities show youth that "learning" is a reason to be involved, whether in sports, clubs, arts, or community service, and provide opportunities to connect with a wide array of adult and peer mentors. Youth development programs are also *care-centered*: they provide family-like environments where youth can feel safe and build trusting relationships. (*Younger Americans Act Policy Proposal [4/7/00 Draft]*, National Collaboration for Youth, 2000)

Youth development program(s) help youth deal successfully with the challenges of adolescence and prepare them for the independence and responsibilities of being parents, workers, and citizens, by attempting to help youth develop "competencies." These programs also:

- conduct activities with a primarily nonacademic focus;
- employ primarily active and experimental learning methods; and
- promote the competencies through group and one-to-one activities, which may include activities in youth clubs, sports and recreation, peer counseling and teaching, mentoring, arts, values education, leadership development, crime and delinquency prevention, youth employment as part of an educational program, community service or volunteerism, literacy, after school programs, career counseling, job skills training, drug abuse prevention, alcohol education, parenting skills activities, ethnic or cultural enrichment, tutoring, and academic enrichment.

(S.673, *Youth Development Block Grant*, 104th Congress)

A Youth development organization is a private nonprofit youth-serving organization with a major emphasis on providing youth development programs. (S.673, *Youth Development Block Grant*, 104th Congress)

Youth-serving organization: An organization with a primary focus on providing youth development, health and fitness, educational, substance abuse prevention, child welfare, child protective, psychological, parenting, vocational and training, teen pregnancy, rehabilitative, or residential services to youth. (S.673, *Youth Development Block Grant*, 104th Congress)

Community-based youth development programs apply accepted theory and empirical evidence (indicating that such programs are essential to the healthy development of young adolescents) through interventions designed to help youth build personal resilience. A resilient individual has these attributes:

- Social competence;
- Problems-solving skills;
- Autonomy (sense of self-identity and an ability to act independently and to exert control over his or her environment);
- Sense of purpose and of a future.

Programs work on three levels: helping individual youth build these four characteristics; ensuring that there is at least one caring, consistent adult in each young person's life; and developing a sense of security in the lives of all young people. (*A Matter of Time*, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992)

Youth development services provide guidance and support; safe places to live, learn and play; and a variety of opportunities that will contribute to the healthy development of young people. (National Collaboration for Youth, *Program Needs Assessment Survey*, 1996)

Youth development programs are designed to meet the human development needs of youth and to build a set of core assets and competencies needed to participate successfully in adolescent and adult life. (*A Guided Tour of Youth Development*, The Youth Development Institute)

Youth development programs assist young people in developing competencies that will enable them to grow, develop their skills and become healthy, responsible and caring youth and adults. (*The Handbook of Positive Youth Outcomes*, The Youth Development Institute)

Youth Developmental Needs, Inputs, Resources

Young people have basic needs critical to survival and healthy development. They are a sense of:

- Safety and structure;
- Belonging and membership;
- Self-worth and an ability to contribute;
- Independence and control over one's life;
- Closeness and several good relationships; and,
- Competence and mastery.

(*A New Vision: Promoting Youth Development*, Testimony of Karen Johnson Pittman, Director, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, before the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, September 30, 1991)

Youth developmental needs (based on research), include the need for:

- Basic food and shelter,
- Supportive, caring relationships,
- Safe places, and
- Opportunities for growth.

Specific needs in these areas are influenced by current development (physical, cognitive and social), as well as individual characteristics and a broad set of background and contextual factors. Developmental needs are met within a social context and are influenced by the demands and supports provided by those contexts, such as the family, school, and community. (*Youth Development Programs and Outcomes: Final Report for the YMCA of the USA*, Search Institute, 1996)

Seven Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents (and their characteristics):

- **Need: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Characteristics include:

- changing hormone levels produce periods of boundless energy and lethargy
- desire to test new physical capabilities
- normal variation in onset of puberty, rate of growth
- vulnerability to injury due to rapid growth

- **Need: COMPETENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT**

Characteristics include:

- desire for personal recognition
- desire for responsibility
- desire to succeed
- emergence of new interests, capabilities
- emerging racial/cultural identity
- emerging sexual identity
- "imaginary audience" self-consciousness
- need for approval from adults
- need for approval from peers
- somewhat shaky self-esteem
- vulnerability to adult expectations

- **Need: SELF-DEFINITION**

Characteristics include:

- emerging gender identity
- emerging racial/cultural identity
- emerging sense of a personal future
- emotionalism, mood swings
- new body image
- new reactions from others
- onset of formal operations

- **Need: CREATIVE EXPRESSION**

Characteristics include:

- desire to test new physical and mental capabilities
- emerging racial/cultural identity
- emerging sexual identity
- onset of formal operations

- **Need: POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS WITH PEERS AND ADULTS**

Characteristics include:

- continued importance of parents and other adults
- "imaginary audience," self-consciousness
- increasing importance of peers
- maturing social skills
- need for approval from adults
- need for approval from peers
- search for models, heroes, and heroines

Need: STRUCTURE AND CLEAR LIMITS

Characteristics include:

- authoritarianism
- desire for autonomy
- desire to know and understand rules and limits
- increasing importance of peers
- lack of life experience
- need for continued adult guidance
- need for security
- onset of formal operations
- "personal fable," immunity to harm

- **Need: MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION**

Characteristics include:

- desire for autonomy
- desire to be part of the "real" adult world
- desire for personal recognition
- desire for responsibility
- emerging gender identity
- emerging racial/cultural identity
- lack of life experience
- maturing social skills
- onset of formal operations
- readiness to make commitments to ideals, activities, and people

(Our Children at Risk: Children and Youth Issues, 1998, YMCA of the USA, 1998)

Fundamental resources: America's Promise created a blueprint for success, a unified plan, calling on the public and private sectors to focus their time, talents, and treasures toward providing our nation's youth access to five fundamental resources:

- A caring adult, role model, or mentor;
- Safe places to learn and grow during non-school hours
- A healthy start;
- A marketable skill through effective education; and
- An opportunity for young people to "give back" through community service.

(The Report To The Nation: America's Promise, November 1997, The Alliance For Youth, Executive Summary)

Youth Development Critical Tasks, Competencies or Assets

Critical tasks for adolescents (10-15 years old) to accomplish to become productive and responsible adults are:

- ***Cognitive development:***
 - Expand knowledge;
 - Develop critical thinking and reasoning skills; and
 - Experience competence through academic achievement.

- ***Social development:***
 - Increase communication and negotiation skills;
 - Increase capacity for meaningful relationships with peers and adults; and
 - Explore adult rights and responsibilities.
- ***Physical development:***
 - Begin to mature physically and to understand changes that come with puberty;
 - Increase movement skills through physical risks;
 - Develop habits that promote lifelong physical fitness; and
 - Learn to take and manage appropriate physical risks.
- ***Emotional development:***
 - Develop a sense of personal identity;
 - Develop a sense of personal autonomy and control; and
 - Develop coping, decision-making, and stress-management skills.
- ***Moral development:***
 - Develop personal values;
 - Develop a sense of accountability in relation to the larger society; and
 - Apply values and beliefs in meaningful ways.

(*Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989)

Youth development competencies -- To succeed as adults, youth must acquire adequate attitudes, behaviors, and skills in five areas:

- ***Health*** - Good current health status and evidence of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that will assure future well-being, for example, exercise, good nutrition, and understanding the consequences of risky behaviors.
- ***Personal/Social Skills*** - Intrapersonal skills - the ability to understand emotions and practice self-discipline; and interpersonal skills - working with other, developing and sustaining friendships through cooperation, empathy, and negotiation, and developing judgement skills and coping systems.

- ***Knowledge, Reasoning, and Creativity*** - A broad base of knowledge and an ability to appreciate and demonstrate creative expression. Good oral, written and problem-solving skills, and an ability to learn. Interest in life-long learning and achieving.
- ***Vocational Awareness*** - A broad understanding of life options and the steps to take in making choices. Adequate preparation for work and family life and an understanding of the value and purpose of family, work, and leisure.
- ***Citizenship*** - Understanding national, community, and racial, ethnic, or cultural group history and values. Desire to be ethical and to be involved in efforts that contribute to the broader good.

(*A New Vision: Promoting Youth Development*, Testimony of Karen Johnson Pittman, Director, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, before the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, September 30, 1991)

Youth development competency areas identified are (**OUTCOMES**): **Originality** (Creative Competency), **Understanding ourselves and others** (Personal Competency), **Thinking and Reasoning** (Cognitive Competency), **Civic Competency**, **Our Bodies** (Physical Health Competency), **Mental Health Competency**, **Employability Competency**, and **Social Competency**. (*The Handbook of Positive Youth Outcomes*, The Youth Development Institute)

Youth development competencies are:

- ***Social competencies***, such as work and family life skills, problem-solving skills, and communication skills;
- ***Moral competencies***, such as personal values and ethics, a sense of responsibility and citizenship (including participation in civic life and community service);
- ***Emotional competencies***, such as a sense of personal identity, self-confidence, autonomy, and the ability to resist negative peer pressure;
- ***Physical competencies***, such as physical conditioning and endurance, and an appreciation for and strategies to achieve lifelong physical health and fitness; and

- **Cognitive competencies**, such as knowledge, reasoning ability, creativity, and a lifelong commitment to learning and achievement.

(S.673, *Youth Development Block Grant*, 104th Congress)

Assets are factors promoting positive teenage development. These assets may result from "external" factors such as positive relationships in families, friendship groups, schools, and the community, or they may result from "internal" factors reflecting the teenager's personal convictions, values, and attitudes. Assets can equip adolescents to make wise choices. Some assets are encouragingly common among youth--such as caring about people's feelings and educational aspiration. Other assets are alarmingly rare--positive school climate, positive peer influence, and parent communication. (*The Troubled Journey: A Profile of American Youth*, RespecTeen)

40 Developmental Assets, include external and internal assets. External asset types are support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and time use. Internal asset types are educational commitment, positive values, social competencies and positive identity. Under each asset type there are specific asset names and definitions, totaling 40 asset names. (*Youth Development Programs and Outcomes: Final Report for the YMCA of the USA*, Search Institute, 1996)

Youth Outcomes

Positive youth outcomes are:

Self-efficacy
Mental health
Educational commitment
Others

Negative youth outcomes are:

Delinquency
Drug and alcohol use
School dropout
Others

Youth Development programs can provide a set of developmentally rich contexts where relationships are formed, development can take place safely, and opportunities for growth in multiple areas can be stimulated. By themselves, however they do not determine a youth's outcomes either positive or negative. (*Youth Development Programs and Outcomes: Final Report for the YMCA of the USA*, Search Institute, 1996)

Other Youth Development Terms

Youth Development Perspective suggests that helping young people achieve their full potentials is the best way to prevent them from becoming involved in risky behavior. (Family and Youth Services Bureau [FYSB], as stated in the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth brochure)

Youth Development Strategies focus on giving young people the chance to build skills, exercise leadership, form relationships with caring adults, and help their communities. (Family and Youth Services Bureau [FYSB], as stated in the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth brochure)

Youth Development Approach acknowledges both youth as resources in rebuilding communities and that helping young people requires strengthening families and communities. It has three components:

- Viewing young people and families as partners, rather than as clients, and involving them in designing and delivering programs and services;
- Giving all youth access to both prevention and intervention services and programs that meet their developmental needs;
- Offering youth opportunities to develop relationships with caring, supportive adults.

(Family and Youth Services Bureau [FYSB], as stated in the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth brochure)

Youth development's philosophy involves families and communities. It supports healthy development in an environmental context. Young people are not "clients" in this model but partners. Their families are not incidental to the process, their neighbors are not indifferent bystanders, and other community resources are not ignored. (*Youth Development: On the Path Toward Professionalization*, National Assembly, 1999)